



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS

Effective communication in the workplace is important for everyone. For managers and supervisors, it's crucial. No matter how good team members are at their jobs, miscommunication or a lack of communication from a manager or supervisor can diminish efficiency, create confusion and damage a team's cohesion and performance. Honing your communication skills, on the other hand, is a surefire way to become a better leader.

DEVELOP A CULTURE OF COMMUNICATION

It's vitally important to create an atmosphere that fosters open communication between and among you and your team. Make sure your team members know they can ask questions or raise issues without fear. Let them know they will be heard and respected, and reinforce that truth by promptly acknowledging input and answering questions – even if you don't always have the answer they want to hear.

Have an open door policy to encourage face-to-face discussion, which will help you develop mutual trust. You may need to put limits on your availability so you can get things done, but communicate those limitations up front. Consider blocking an hour or two of open-door time every day. Let your team know when it's okay or not okay to drop by, and under what conditions they should schedule time with you instead.

Emphasize and model clarity, honesty and tact, and your whole team will reap the benefits.

LEARN TO LISTEN

Being in command is not just about giving orders. On the contrary, the first step toward mutual understanding is active listening. These four simple tips can help you improve your listening skills:

- » **Hear whole thoughts.** Resist the temptation to hear a few words and then tune out the rest because you're busy planning your response.
- » **Validate the speaker.** In the other person's words or your own, let the speaker know you heard and understood what he or she said. You might say, for example, "What I hear you saying is..." and restate the point. The other person will feel heard and have the opportunity to clarify anything you've misunderstood.
- » **Give nonverbal signals.** Maintain eye contact, nod or interject "okay" or "mm-hmm" when the other person makes a point, etc. Your body posture says a lot, and the speaker picks up on and responds to your non-verbal cues.
- » **Make it a two-way street.** In addition to doing things that show you're listening, look for signs that the person is listening to you. Is eye contact maintained? Does the person respond in a way that shows an understanding of what you've said?

BE OPEN TO DIFFERENT STYLES

Communication styles, skills and preferences vary from individual to individual. As a supervisor, you need to understand what works best for each of your team members so you can be sure communication is flowing both ways. While one person may need to receive explicit, step-by-step instructions about what you want done, another may perform better when you provide more general guidance. You may have to check in frequently with an employee who doesn't like to convey bad news and won't tell you he's struggling, while another never hesitates to let you know he needs help.

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LEADING BY COMMUNICATING WELL

While you want everyone to communicate effectively, there are some communication duties that fall specifically to you as a manager or supervisor. Here are a few tips that will help you be a better leader and get the best from your team:

- » **Keep your team appropriately informed** about what's going on in your organization. Team members should be confident that you will share information when you're allowed to and that they can count on the accuracy of what you say.
- » **Provide timely, valuable feedback on performance.** You may have an annual evaluation process, but that doesn't mean you only tell employees how they're doing once a year. Give them praise whenever they do a good job, and be constructive when you have to tell them – in private – that they're not meeting your expectations.
- » **Don't place blame for communication breakdowns.** Yes, everyone should be held accountable, but the most important thing is to understand the problem and prevent it from happening again. Is there a flaw in the system that inhibits effective communication? Is there a way to assess and improve your staff's communications skills?

George Bernard Shaw said, "The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." As a manager or supervisor, you play a vital role in making sure that workplace communication is not an illusion that causes problems, but a reality that helps your team function effectively.

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